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BITTER MELONS

A Study Guide

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Filmed on a 1955 expedition, led by Laurence K. Marshall, and
sponsored by the Peabody Museum of Harvard University and the
Smithsonian Institution of Washington.

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* * *

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and Timothy Asch, who provided information and insights about
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PART I: SYNOPSIS OF THE FILM

Bitter Melons is a film about life in the Central Kalahari Desert, where game is scarce and waterholes are dry for most of the year. The film centers on Uxkone, a blind /Gwi musician, on the music he plays, and on the small band with which he lives. Bitter Melons is divided into two main sections. The first illustrates the problems of finding food and water in a hostile environment. Uxkone sings a number of songs about the plants and animals which sustain the /Gwi, and we see members of his band gathering and hunting.

The second section of the film is about the social organization and culture of the /Gwi. While Uxkone sings several songs about social life, we see !Gai, a member of Uxkone's band, cross the veld to look for his relatives. He finds them two days later and brings them back to his camp, where all the men dance the "Ostrich Courting Dance". !Gai's relatives stayed with Uxkone for several days, and when they left, they took !Gai and his family with them. Uxkone and his wife decided to stay. They were old - "finished", said Uxkone - and they did not expect to live another season. As the film ends, we hear for the last time Uxkone's favorite song, "Bitter Melons", and watch as !Gai and his relatives disappear into the tall grass of the veld.

In the description which follows, Bitter Melons has been broken down into "sequences". A "sequence" is a series of closely related shots, centering on a single action. "Setting a Snare for a Duiker" is a sequence, as is "Collecting Wild Cucumbers". Footage counts (x:y) in this Study Guide are given in feet and frames. When no frame number is given, it means that the footage is approximate. For the purposes of this study guide, foot 0:00 is the first frame of the title "A Documentary Educational Resources Production". The first frame with an image is 3:38, the first frame with a clear image is 4:02, and the title "Bitter Melons" first appears at 16:00.

SEQUENCE 1 INTRODUCTION

3:38-59:15

Action. At camp, Ukxone¹ sits and plays his hunting bow. We see several other members of his band, including //Ue//abe² and an old woman.

Music. Ukxone plays "Bitter Melons", the theme song of the film³.

Comments. All the scenes of Ukxone playing the bow, of the children playing games and songs, and of the Ostrich Courting Dance, were recorded in synchronous sound. Using a system designed by Daniel Blitz, the sounds and images in the film were recorded at the same time and later matched perfectly. This was one of the first attempts to record synchronous sound in the field.

SEQUENCE 2 GATHERING TSAMA MELONS

59:15-133:04

Action. The members of Ukxone's band walk out into the tall grass to gather tsama⁴ melons, their main source of water during the dry winter. After collecting several dozen, they return to camp to eat them.

Music. Ukxone sings a song which he called "/Nham Tsoro", "In Praise of the Tsama Melon".

Narration. Many of Ukxone's songs were about the environment he lived in. He sang about important plants and animals, and about the constant problem of finding water. During autumn and winter, the only water in the central Kalahari Desert is contained in roots, in the rumen of large antelopes, and in the most valued and abundant aquifer, the tsama melon⁵.

Ukxone composed several songs about tsama melons, and learned others from a Bakalahari musician named Djoro. One of the tsama melon songs which Ukxone composed was called "/Nham Tsoro", "In Praise of the Tsama Melon".

Comments. Tsama melons tend to grow in widely separated patches. Ukxone's band had moved to /Ei kxa o (where this sequence was filmed) in order to exploit the melons which grew abundantly there.

SEQUENCE 3 EATING TSAMA MELONS

133:05-194:02

Action. Back in camp with the harvest, !Gai cuts the top off a melon and mashes the pulp with a stick. He eats some of the pulp, and offers a handful to his son.

Music. Ukxone sings "Melon Soup", alluding to the stew people make by boiling meat in tsama melon juice.

1. For the pronunciation of this and other names, see the Pronunciation Guide, below, page 33. 2. Appears at 51-54. See the kinship diagram of Ukxone's band (Figure 3, page 12).

3. For more on this song, see below, Sequence 6, and Part II, page 29.

4. Citrullus vulgaris (Story 1958:48).

5. This is true only of part of /Gwi country. For more on the water resources of the /Gwi, see below, Part II, pages 21-23.

Narration. From Djoro, Ukxone learned a song called "Melon Soup".

Comments. Tsama melons are a relative of our watermelons, but they are smaller and less tasty¹. An adult can survive on about eight tsama melons a day.

The melons are useful not only for food and water. The rinds are used for cooking², for carrying and storing liquids³, and as resonators for musical instruments⁴.

SEQUENCE 4 SETTING A SNARE FOR A DUIKER

194:03-275:33

Action. Using sticks and a string, !Gai sets a snare along a path he knows duikers⁵ use. The next day he comes back to check his snare. It is empty: the line hangs loose, gnawed through by the duiker after it was caught.

Music. Ukxone sings a song about the duiker, imitating the duiker running with his chin and with the stick he uses to strike the bow⁶. The duiker song we hear in this sequence was recorded on two separate occasions: the first performance lasts from 194:03 to 209, and the second from 212 to 252. Note that there are two parts in the song: a percussive bass line which Ukxone plays on the bow, and a vocal counterpoint, which he sings⁷. We hear the rhythmic bass at the beginning and end of the song⁸; Ukxone joins in with his voice in the middle⁹.

Narration. From Djoro, Ukxone learned a song about a small nocturnal antelope called /un, the duiker, which men snare. Ukxone said the song imitated the duiker running. Striking the bow was like the sound of the duiker's small feet on the ground; and when the bow string was released, the duiker was leaping.

The snares are placed on the small paths the duiker uses every night, but sometimes the duiker gnaws through the grass cord and sets itself free.

SEQUENCE 5: WILD CUCUMBERS

275:33-306:39

Action. A boy picks and eats !ka, a species of spiny cucumber¹⁰.

Music. Ukxone plays a song which he called "!Ka", after the cucumber.

1. According to Story (1958:48)
2. See !Gai cooking the tortoise in Sequence 8.
3. Thomas (1959:48)
4. See Ukxone's song in Sequence 10 (692-732).
5. A small antelope, weighing about 40 lbs (Lee 1965:116).
6. For more on /Gwi bow technique, see below, Part II, page 29.
7. For more on the structure of /Gwi songs, see below, Part II, page 28.
8. 194:03 to 209 and 252 to 276.
9. 212 to 252
10. Cucumis sp.

Narration. One of the songs which Ukxone learned from Djoro was about !ka, the small cucumbers with soft spikes which ripen late and retain their moisture for a month or longer after the tsama melons have dried.

Comments. !Ka are wet enough to keep people alive until the spring rains begin to fall. Story (1958:49) claims that these cucumbers are juicy, but rather sour.

SEQUENCE 6 PLANTING TSAMA MELONS

307:00-369:12

Action. /Oi/kwe, an old woman who lived with Ukxone, drops tsama melon seeds into a prepared garden.

Music. Ukxone plays "Bitter Melons", probably his favorite song. "Bitter Belons" is a sad song; its strongly accented "blue note"¹ suggests the disappointment, when one is thirsty, of finding a tsama melon which is too bitter to eat.

Narration. Ukxone composed the song "Bitter Melons" when /Oi/kwe, one of the old women who lived with him, planted tsama melons for the first time. /Oi/kwe learned about planting from the Bakalahari, a Bantu people, who told her she must save seed and plant new melons each year, because wild melons growing on cultivated land are bitter.

Comments. Bushmen who do not live on farms generally plant no crops at all, so the fact that Ukxone's band is planting tsama melons suggests their importance to the /Gwi. Tsama melons grow abundantly around human settlements, since people often discard the pits after eating the melons, but neither the /Gwi nor the !Kung seem to have considered planting them before (Lee 1965:160).

SEQUENCE 7 GATHERING WILD PLANTS

369:13-432:07

Action. The members of Ukxone's band, except for Ukxone himself, gather wild plants in the veld. After struggling with some thorny branches, !Gai digs up a large ga root². One of the boys picks up a turtle³ at 425.

Music. None

Narration. Planting a melon land was an exceptional event among the people living at /Ei kxa o. Their livelihood was gathering, an activity in which everyone participated but Ukxone, who was too blind to see root vines in the grass. Nine people lived at /Ei kxa o with Ukxone: his wife, almost as old as he; their son; two old women; two young boys; and !Gai, with his wife and baby. !Gai was the fulcrum of the little band. His strength and endurance enabled him to provide for Ukxone, but he was under no obligation to do so, since the two men were not closely related. Khoisan⁴ men who live in

1. At 336, 348, and elsewhere. 2. Probably Coccinia rehmanii

3. Probably Geochelone pardalis (Lee 1965:120). See Sequence 8 for shots of !Gai cooking this turtle.

4. That is, Bushmen and Hottentots.

rich country with permanent herds of game are hunters, and consider gathering beneath them. But in the Central desert, where /Gwi people live, the herds of game migrate, and often fail to visit /Ei kxa o for years at a time. Hunters are obliged to distribute the meat of the game they kill, so that all the people living together may share it. But women share the roots they gather only with their immediate families. At /Ei kxa o, the people augmented the food they gathered by collecting small animals.

Comments. The region around /Ei kxa o was a poor one, even by Bushman standards. For more on this point, see below, Part II, page 21.

SEQUENCE 8 GETTING WATER FROM ROOTS AND ANIMALS; 432:08-580:26
PREPARING A TORTOISE TO EAT

Action. Ukxone shaves a bi¹ root, drinks some of the water which he squeezes out of the shavings, and uses the rest to give himself a shower². !Gai and Ukxone butcher a gemsbok and drink the water from the gemsbok's stomach³. !Gai peels open a tortoise, removes the giblets, and puts it in a pit full of hot ashes to roast⁴.

Music. Ukxone sings a song he calls "People Are Laughing". He is please with his performance: at 572 he stops playing, chuckles to himself for a moment, and then begins again⁵.

Narration. In the dry months, and during years of drought, roots provide one of the two sources of water people can actually take into their mouths and drink, unlike the soup of the tsama melon, which must be eaten⁶.

Although he was not obligated to share such a small animal with everyone, !Gai prepared the tortoise in the public place in the center of the village, and distributed it as if it were a gemsbok.

The other source of real water is the rumen of large antelopes. The rumen is as much of a delight as the meat of a gemsbok when someone is fortunate enough to kill one. Perhaps it was on such an occasion that Ukxone composed the song he called "People Are Laughing".

Comments. 1. Shaving the bi root. The bi root is a particularly valuable source of water for the /Gwi, since it stays wet long after the tsama melons have dried. A botanist on the 1955 expedition once asked !Gai to collect a bi root, so he could identify it. !Gai refused at first, saying that if he picked one now, it would not be there when he really needed it. Finally he relented, and led the botanist across four miles of almost featureless country, to a spot where he had seen a bi vine the previous summer.⁷ This story shows how carefully the /Gwi manage their water resources.

1. Raphionacme burkei (Story 1958:38).

2. 432:08-456:13; 456:13-469:24; 474:27-483:10. 3. 483:11-534:07

4. 469:25-474:26; 534:06-580:26. 5. At 575.

6. See above, Sequence 3

7. Thomas (1959:112)

2. Butchering the gemsbok. Several species of large antelope, including the kudu and the eland, can obtain all the water they need from the plants they eat¹. The gemsbok also seems to be able to survive indefinitely without drinking. These animals store water in part of their stomach, the rumen; this is the water which !Gai is drinking in the film². This sequence again shows how careful the /Gwi are with water: Ukxone squeezes every drop out of the half-digested grass from the gemsbok's stomach. The water and blood were then stored in containers and shared with the other people in camp³.

3. Preparing a tortoise. /Gwi ordinarily consider tortoises and other small animals to be "gathered food", which means that they are not obliged to distribute them as they would the meat of larger animals. There was no game at /Ei kxa o, though, so !Gai prepared the tortoise for distribution as he would have prepared a gemsbok or an eland.

SEQUENCE 9 RESTING

580:27-611:12

Action. The members of Ukxone's band rest in the shade.

Music. "People Are Laughing", continued from Sequence 8.

Comments. /Gwi country is sometimes excessively hot, and people must often rest in the shade during the middle of the day. On the hottest days of the summer, the people dig shallow pits in the sand, line them with moist bi pulp, and lie in them until it is cool enough to gather food. The moist pulp keeps them from drying out⁴.

SEQUENCE 10 TRAVELLING TO OKWA

611:13-735:24

Action. !Gai and //Ue//abe travel across the veld towards a fire set by !Gai's relatives. Along the way they stop to investigate an aardvark hole. Later, !Gai goes to find his relatives, while //Ue//abe hunts.

Music. The three songs by Ukxone in this sequence are about social life, and the distances which separate people.

1. "Shouting"⁵ Ukxone said that this song recalled a day when he was lost in the bush, and the people he was living with refused to shout to him to guide him back. Ukxone said the song imitates the sound of shouting. One can hear this best at 633-659. Here, Ukxone touches the string of his bow lightly with his finger⁶, producing a series of harmonics which form the following melody (Figure 1). The skips of a fourth and a sixth really do sound like people shouting.

1. For an interesting non-technical account of the physiological adaptations which allow these animals to do this, see Taylor (1969).

2. 510-514.

3. Thomas (1959:48)

4. Thomas (1959:105)

5. 607:20-660

6. Ukxone was one of the only Bushmen in all of Africa who used this technique (England 1968:198). For more on this point, see below, Part II, page 29.



Figure 1: An excerpt from "Shouting", beginning at 632. The pitches shown here are only relative.

2. "Has Your Brother Come?"¹ Ukkxone's wife once asked him, "Has your brother come?" Ukkxone said that he hadn't. The incident occurred before Ukkxone's brother died in a smallpox epidemic, but the song was composed afterwards.

3. "Sore Legs"² This song is unusual because Ukkxone uses a tsama melon rind as a resonator for his bow, instead of the more common metal pot³. The melon rind produces a softer and mellower sound than a pot: the difference is something like the difference between a recorder and a flute.

Narration. Ukkxone composed a number of songs about social life and the distances that separate groups of people. !Gai saw the smoke of a grass fire on the horizon and assumed that his relatives had set it. He took //Ue//abe and travelled to visit them and bring them to /Ei kxa o.

One of Ukkxone's songs was called "Shouting", which he composed in bitterness at people who refused to shout and guide him when he was lost.

He composed a song called "Has Your Brother Come?"

One song he called "Sore Legs".

!Gai looked for his relatives while //Ue//abe hunted.

Comments. /Gwi Bushman bands are small and far apart. The size of Bushman bands generally depends on the amount of food and water available in a region, and because the /Ei kxa o region was poor, it could only support the small population of Ukkxone's band. Visiting between bands is common, both because people like to visit friends and relatives, and because visiting helps to distribute food and water more or less equally to all people.

1. 668-690

2. 692-732

3. 693:29-703:02

Action. Children play games and songs which imitate different animals: the giraffe, the kudu, the porcupine, and the hyena.

Music. 1. "Giraffe"¹ This song is played by two people, on one bow. One player holds the bow and plays the bass line, plucking the string with his finger and stopping it with his chin². The second player provides a rhythmic counterpoint by striking the string with a stick, and may also sing, as he does here³.

2. "Kudu"⁴ This song is played in very much the same way as "Giraffe".

3. "Porcupine"⁵ "Porcupine" is a game of attack and defense, much like the "scissor-paper-stone" game that European and American children play. England transcribes the rhythm of this song as follows:

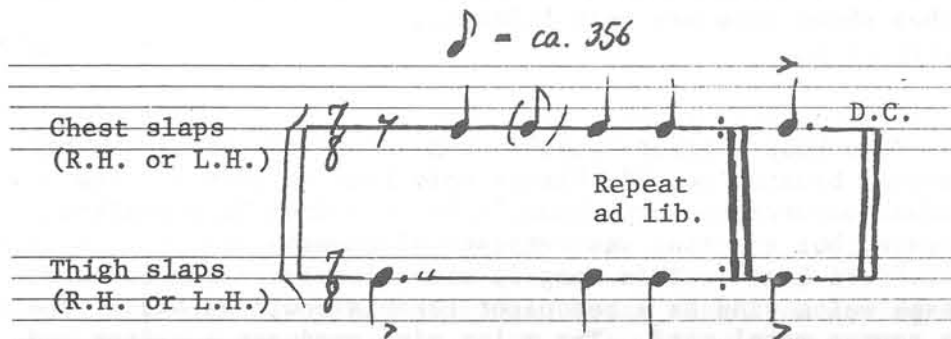


Figure 2: "Porcupine", transcribed by Nicholas England (1968:66). Used with permission.

4. "Hyena"⁶ The Hyena Game⁷ obviously imitates hyenas "courting"; the Hyena Song⁸ is played like "Giraffe" and "Kudu". One unusual bow technique may be seen at 814:34: Player I, the one who is holding the bow, places his hand on the bow stave, lowering its fundamental tone nearly a half step. Similarly, he takes his toe off the bow at 816:18, which raises its tone a bit. The /Gwi have developed the technique of the hunting bow to a high degree (England 1968:123).

Narration. Animals are attracted to the new grass which springs up after a fire. /Gwi play music and rhythmic games about animals. Unlike Ukwone's compositions, animal music is traditional. Some of the songs are played on the bow, like "Giraffe" and "Kudu".

"Porcupine" is a game of attack and defense.

There is a game, with a little song, about the way hyenas, always libidinous, make themselves small to creep among sleeping people and eat their skin clothes.

- | | | |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| 1. 736-765:38 | 2. 744:34-750:29 | 3. 757:24-765:38 |
| 4. 765:39-773:08 | 5. 774:09-790:21 | 6. 790:22-817:16 |
| 7. 790:22-809:19 | 8. 809:20-817:16 | |

Comments. The animal songs in this sequence are "folk songs", unlike Ukxone's which are highly personal. The children's bow technique, is entirely traditional, while Ukxone's is extremely innovative¹. The difference between Ukxone and the children in this sequence is like the difference between David Oistrakh and a country fiddler.

SEQUENCE 12 RETURNING TO /EI KXA O

817-869

Action. The members of the Okwa band (!Gai's relatives) return to /Ei kxa o with !Gai and //Ue//abe. People from the two bands sit in the shade, eating tsama melons and smoking.

Music. Ukxone sings a song he called "Who Is That?", which recalls a woman who spurned Ukxone's love.

Narration. !Gai found his relatives, and invited all the Okwa people to /Ei kxa o.

Among his songs about social life was one Ukxone called "Agina Ah", "Who Is That?" Ukxone once fell in love and wanted to marry the woman. Her people would not allow him to take her away. He approached them again and they thrashed him and took her back. Once more he came to her and she looked up from among her people as said, "Agina ah?", "Who is that?".

Comments. A /Gwi person would be likely to know all the people in all neighboring bands. Thus "Who is that?" is a particularly painful question.

SEQUENCE 13 THE OSTRICH DANCE

869-1059

Action. Men and boys from Okwa and /Ei kxa o dance the "Ostrich Courting Dance". The men form a rough circle and chant a rhythmic counterpoint to the clapping of the women, who sit under a tree. The men and boys take turns stepping into the center of the circle, and swinging one leg over the head of another man who has bent over from the waist. This movement is supposed to imitate the courtship of the ostrich.

Music. The men accompany themselves with rhythmical chanting, while the women clap. Elizabeth Marshall Thomas has transcribed the chanting roughly as "he he hi, hehe he hi"².

Comments. There are three takes of the dance in this sequence: one in the beginning, one in the middle, and one as the dance is ending. Note that the dancers are nearly exhausted by the end of the third take, for they had been dancing all afternoon in the hot sun.

1. For more on this point, see below, Part II, page 29.

2. 1959:73

SEQUENCE 14 LEAVING /EI KXA O

1059-1129

Action. Everyone leaves /Ei kxa o except Ukxone and his wife.

Music. "Bitter Melons"

Narration. The people from Okwa did not intend to stay long at /Ei kxa o. !Gai's relatives planned to go north about fifty miles. !Gai and his wife were going with them. The four boys and the two old women said they would go with !Gai. Ukxone and his wife could have accompanied !Gai, although they were not directly related to him or to any of his people. But Ukxone said that he and his wife were old - finished - and they would stay ay /Ei kxa o.¹

* * *

1. For a discussion of the questions raised by this sequence, see below, Part II, page 25.

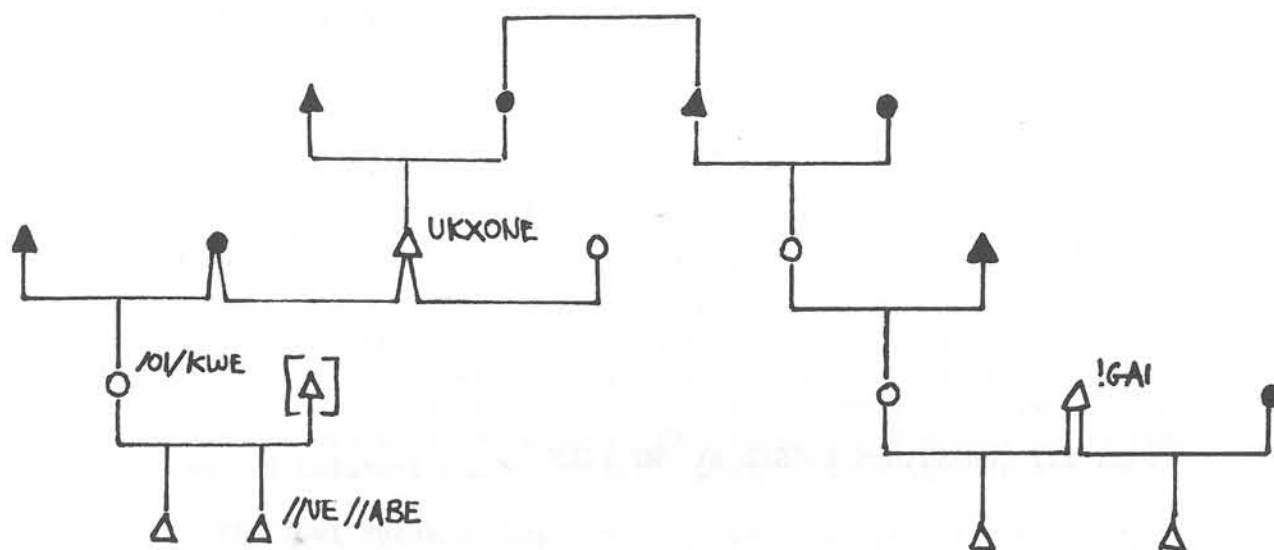


Figure 3: Kinship chart of Ukxone's band. After Thomas 1959:x.

$$\Delta = \text{man}$$

0 = woman

▲ = dead man

● = dead woman

[Δ] = man not in residence

U = marriage

\sqsubset = siblings

PART II: QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE FILM

A. INTRODUCTION

1. Who are the /Gwi?

In 1964 there were about 45 thousand Bushman living in Southern Africa¹. Most of them worked on European farms or Bantu cattle posts, but about 20% of them were strictly hunters and gatherers. Bitter Melons was filmed in 1955, in a part of Botswana (then the Bechuanaland Protectorate) where the Bushmen all pursued this traditional occupation². /Gwi country lies in the grassy plains of what is now called the Central Kalahari Game Preserve, between the towns of Molepolole and Ghanzi. The nearest Bantu settlement is Chukudu³. Lee estimates that in 1964 there were about 3000 hunters and gatherers in the Central Kalahari Game Preserve⁴, most of whom were /Gwi.

The /Gwi speak a language not closely related to !Kung, the language of the Bushmen in most of John Marshall's films. /Gwi belongs to the so-called "Tshu-Khwe" group⁵, which includes the Hottentot languages⁶. !Kung, on the other hand, is classified by Westphal as "Bush A", and his vocabulary tests show no genetic relationship between the Tshu-Khwe and "Bush A" families⁷. /Gwi and !Kung share a number of phonetic elements, such as the four clicks⁸, but their vocabulary and grammar are entirely different⁹. Figure 7 shows the distribution of Tshu-Khwe and Bush A speakers in Southern Africa.

2. Under what circumstances was this film made?

Bitter Melons was filmed in 1955 on an expedition led by Laurence K. Marshall and sponsored by the Peabody Museum of Harvard

-
1. Lee 1965:12; see Figure 4. 2. Lee 1965:21; see Figure 5.
3. See Figure 6. 4. Lee 1965:20 5. Westphal 1962:5
6. Westphal 1963:244. This suggests that the /Gwi and the
Hottentots have a common ancestry (Lee 1965:17).
7. Westphal 1963:237, 244-6, 252; see also Lee 1965:18.
8. All four appear in the kinship terms recorded by Silberbauer (1961).
9. England 1968:33

and the Smithsonian Institution of Washington. The Marshalls spent several years in the early 50's studying the !Kung Bushmen in the Nyae Nyae region of South West Africa. In 1955 they made another trip to Nyae Nyae, but this time they drove in from Bechuanaland instead of from South West Africa. The Expedition left Molepolole on June 12, 1955, and set off towards Ghanzi in the northwest¹. Two weeks later, on June 26, they encountered their first band of /Gwi Bushmen.

The Expedition spent over a month with !Gai and Ukhone's band. From /Gao /o, where they first met them, they followed !Gai and Ukhone to /Ei kxa o², where most of Bitter Melons was shot. Since the Expedition carried only enough water for themselves, they did not give any to Ukhone's people until the day they left. They did provide them with a ration of corn meal, and occasionally they shot game for them. On July 29 the Expedition left !Gai and Ukhone and continued on towards Ghanzi and Nyae Nyae. The events of that month have been sensitively described by Elizabeth Marshall Thomas in her book, The Harmless People³.

3. What has happened to the /Gwi since this film was made?

At the end of the nineteenth century, many of the permanent waterholes in the Ghanzi area were owned by Bushman groups: the !Kung, the /Gwi, and the Naron, among others⁴. The Bushmen used these waterholes as bases for their hunting and gathering trips into the surrounding desert, and they retreated to the waterholes in years of drought. Around 1900 Cecil Rhodes established a colony of Europeans at Ghanzi, intending to set up a buffer zone against German expansion from South West Africa. The early settlers hunted for ostrich plumes and elephant tusks, and practiced a form of subsistence ranching. They tolerated the presence of the Bushmen around their unfenced farms.

During the 1920's and 30's, roads improved and market towns like Gobabis, South West Africa expanded. Commerce between Ghanzi and the outside world gradually increased. But it was not until after the Second World War, and particularly after Botswana's independence in 1966, that commercial ranching with modern techniques finally displaced the hunter-gatherers from their traditional waterholes. Farms around Ghanzi are now fenced, and a variety of labor-saving devices has all but eliminated the need for casual Bushman labor. On most ranches, the Bushmen are now considered squatters - on their own land! - and are frequently

1. Lorna Marshall, field notes. See Figure 6 for the route of the 1955 Expedition.

2. /Ei kxa o is at 22° 25' S., 23° 9' E. 3. 1959:55-141

4. I am indebted to John Marshall for this account.

evicted. They have withdrawn to the tiny slums on the outskirts of Ghanzi, where they sell cheap bows and arrows to tourists, and dance for a shilling or two.

Cut off from their traditional sources of water, it is no longer possible for the Bushmen of the Ghanzi District to survive by hunting and gathering. For many months of the year they live only by wage labor on modern ranches. Some /Gwi still venture into the Kalahari when water roots and tsama melons are available. They trap animals and collect the skins to trade when they return to Ghanzi for the winter. But for many people the strain of living two completely different lives has made it difficult for them to continue hunting and gathering. Today, very few people, if any, practice the hunting and gathering life which was recorded in 1955.

Because the living conditions of the /Gwi have changed radically since Bitter Melons was made, this Study Guide uses the convention of the "ethnographic present". In the rest of the Study Guide, descriptions of the /Gwi are to be understood as descriptions of them as they were in 1955, not as they are now. For similar reasons, descriptions of the !Kung Bushmen of Nyae Nyae refer to their status before 1960¹; and descriptions of the !Kung at Dobe refer to their status in 1965.

1. For details, see L. Marshall 1965:273 and Lee 1965:32.

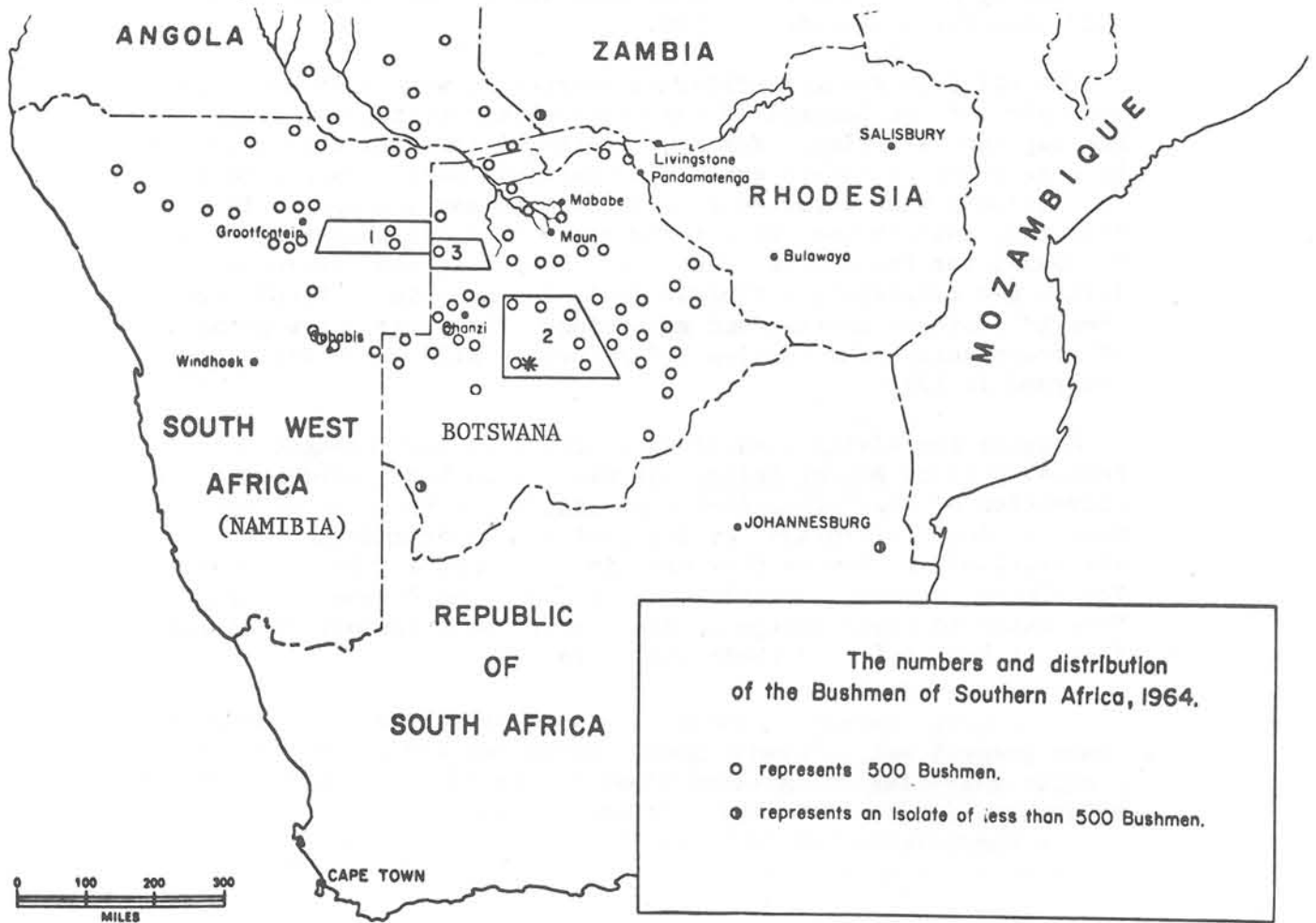


Figure 4: The numbers and distribution of the Bushmen in southern Africa, 1964. The star (*) marks the location of /Ei kxa o, where most of Bitter Melons was filmed. After Lee 1965:14; used with the kind permission of the author.

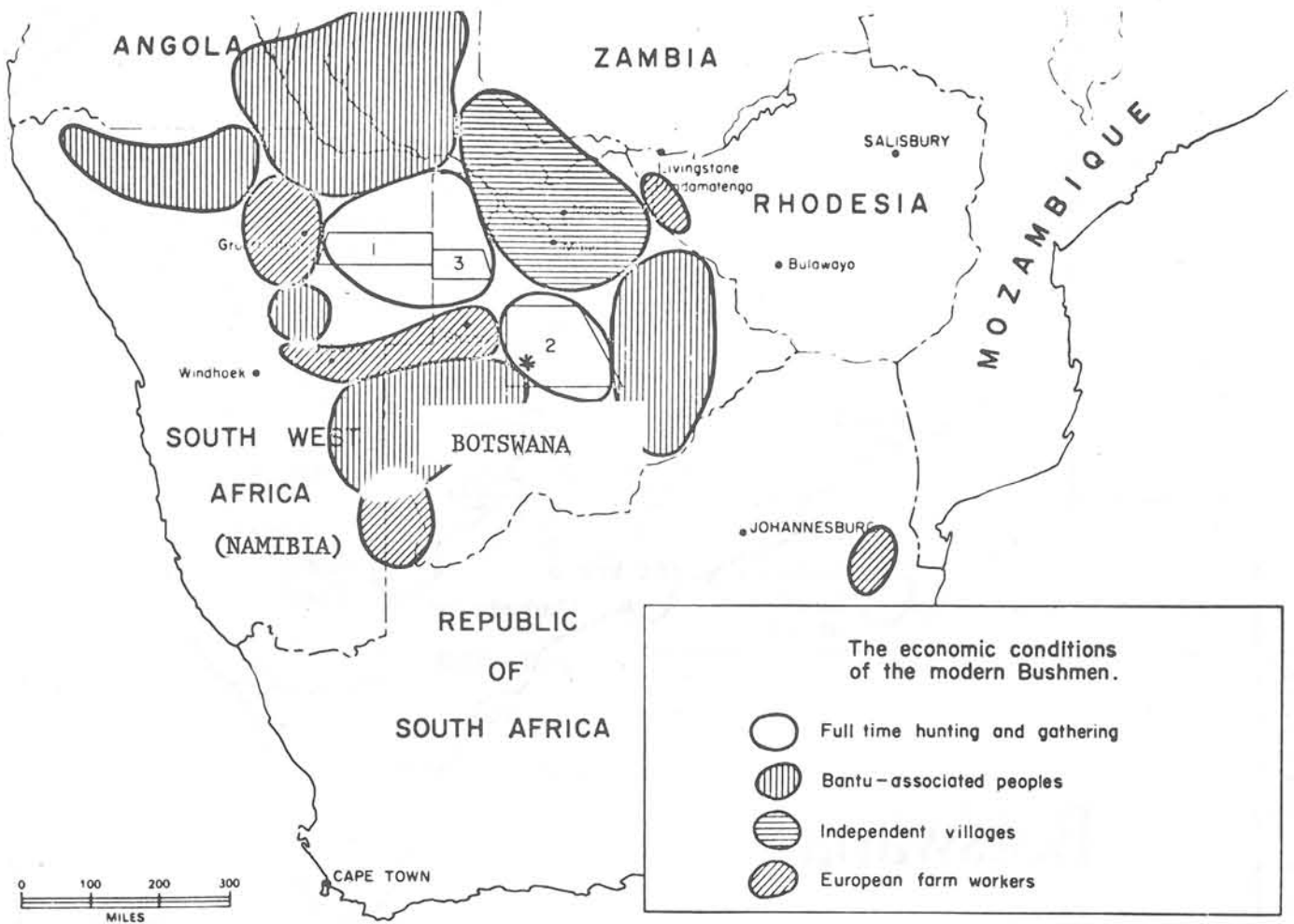


Figure 5: The economic conditions of the Bushmen in 1964. The star (*) marks the location of /Ei kxa o, where most of Bitter Melons was filmed. For an account of the changes in the economic conditions of the Bushmen since 1964, see above, pages 13-14. After Lee 1965:23; used with the kind permission of the author.

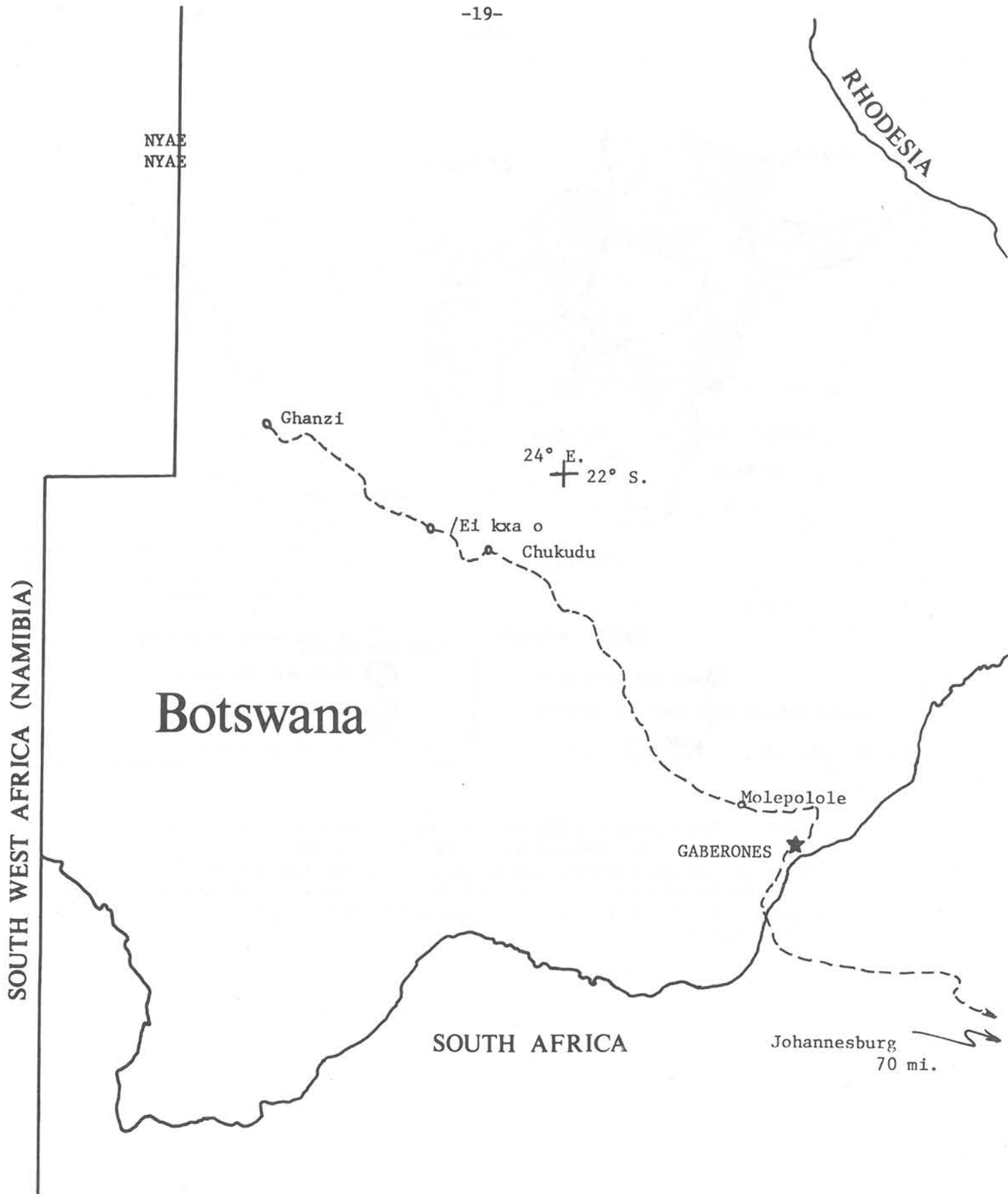


Figure 6: Route of the 1955 Expedition. Base map is from Bartholomew's 1:4,000,000 map of South Africa and Madagascar.

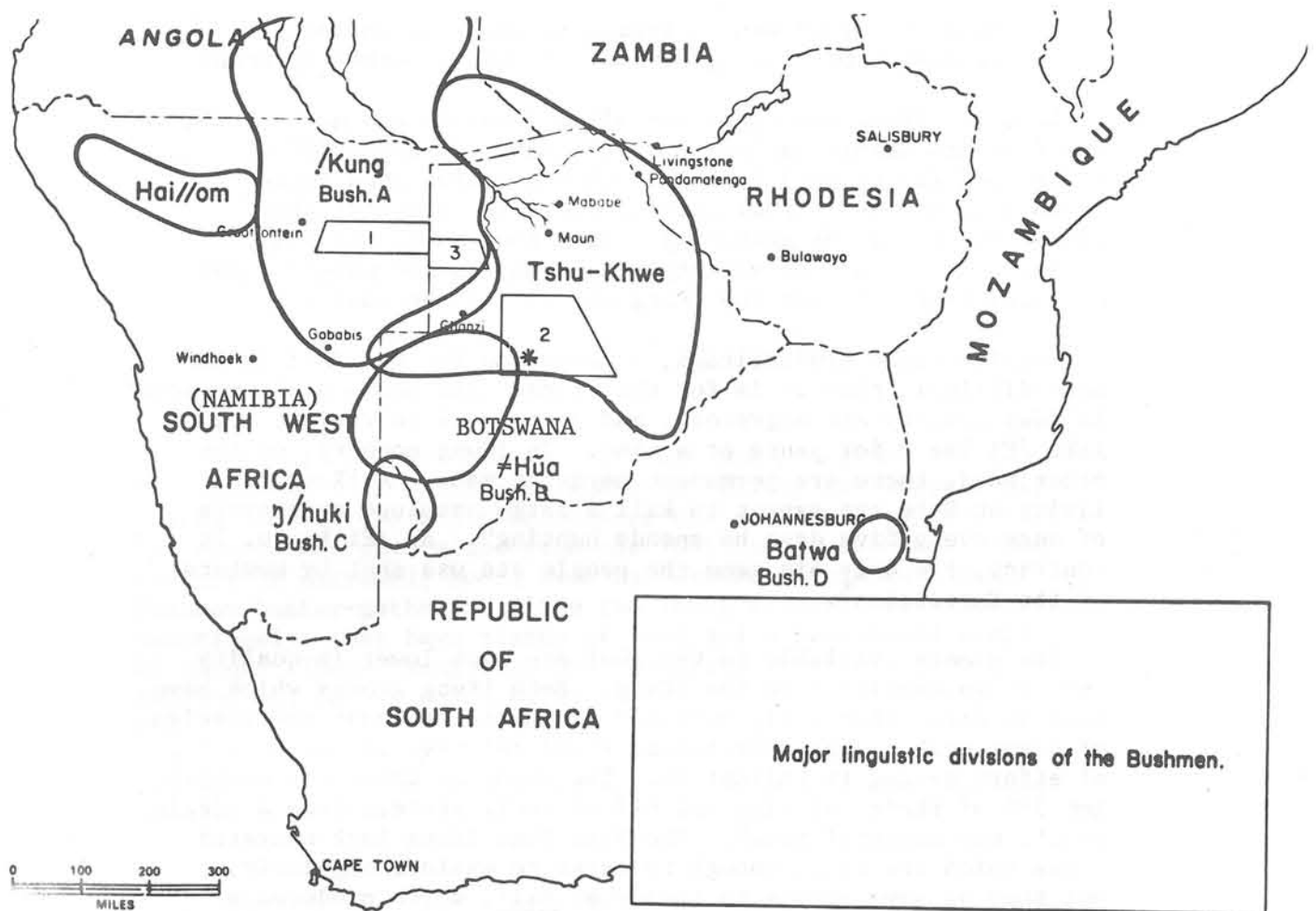


Figure 7: Major linguistic divisions of the Bushmen. The star (*) marks the location of /Ei kxa o, where most of Bitter Melons was filmed. After Lee 1965:14; used with the kind permission of the author.

B. ECONOMICS OF THE /GWI

1. How do the /Gwi make a living in their harsh country?
How does their living compare to that of other Bushmen?

Like the !Kung and other so-called "hunters and gatherers", the /Gwi are mainly gatherers. The !Kung get about 70% of their food (by weight) from wild plants¹, and since there is much less game in /Gwi country they also must get about 70% of their food by gathering. Like the !Kung, the /Gwi collect and eat a wide variety of plants: an incomplete count by Story listed 85 for the !Kung and 25 for the /Gwi².

Despite these similarities, subsistence for the /Gwi is far more difficult than it is for the !Kung. The herds of large game³ in /Gwi country are migratory, and often fail to visit a region like /Ei kxa o for years at a time. In !Kung country, on the other hand, there are permanent herds of game. A !Kung man living at Dobe can expect to kill a large antelope an average of once every five days he spends hunting⁴. At /Ei kxa o, by contrast, the only big game the people ate was shot by members of the Expedition⁵.

The plants available to the /Gwi are much lower in quality than those available to the !Kung. Both !Kung groups which have been studied extensively have had access to at least one species of plant with a high nutritional yield relative to the amount of effort needed to collect it. The !Kung at Dobe, for example, get 59% of their calories and 61% of their protein from a single plant, the mangetti tree⁶. The Nyae Nyae !Kung lack mangetti trees which are close enough to water to exploit regularly, but they do have access to fields of tsi⁷, which produces a nutritious seed⁸. The /Gwi, on the other hand, have neither of these valuable plants. They depend on roots and seeds which require much more work per unit of nutritional yield.

1. L. Marshall 1960:335; Lee 1968:33

2. Story (1958). Story's collection was made in the winter, when many of the edible plants were not in season. He also spent much more time in !Kung country; so that it is likely that the /Gwi eat as many different plants as the !Kung, if not more.

3. Eland, kudu, wildebeeste, and gemsbok 4. Lee 1968:40

5. However, they did manage to snare more game than the !Kung ever did.

6. Riciodendron rautenii; see Lee 1968:39

7. Bauhinia esculenta

8. L. Marshall 1965:248; Story 1958:25

But it is the lack of water, more than anything else, which makes life harder for the /Gwi. Rainfall is lighter in /Gwi country than in !Kung country¹, and the /Gwi now have no access to permanent waterholes². During the dry winter - sometimes as long as nine months - they must live off the water they obtain from plants and animals. By contrast, the !Kung have a relatively secure supply of water. There are a number of permanent waterholes in Nyae Nyae and in the Dobe area, and every !Kung band has inalienable rights to water from at least one of these waterholes³. Because of this the !Kung, unlike the /Gwi, spend a relatively small part of the year extracting water from roots and melons. Around Dobe, for instance, the !Kung use water roots⁴ only in August, September, and October, and then only when they take long gathering trips away from their permanent waterholes⁵.

In short, the /Gwi lead a difficult and precarious life. The possibility of death from hunger or thirst is always real; Ukxone himself claimed that both of his parents died from thirst⁶. But one cannot generalize from the /Gwi to all Bushmen. /Gwi country is extremely poor, even by Bushman standards. Other Bushman hunter-gatherers, like the !Kung at Dobe, live relatively luxuriously: they have plenty of food and a year-round supply of water. These !Kung only have to spend about one day in five hunting and gathering in order to provide for themselves, their children, and their aged dependents⁷. Hunting and gathering is a marginal way of life for the /Gwi because they live in a marginal habitat; under slightly better ecological conditions they could survive with ease.

2. Why are the /Gwi living in such a marginal habitat?

The Bushmen did not always live in the hostile country they now inhabit. In 1652 there were Bushmen living throughout Southern Africa, in a variety of ecological zones. The remains of Bushman settlement are abundant in one of the most fertile areas of South Africa, the forests of the south coast of the Cape Province. Beginning about the 17th century, the Bushmen were progressively exterminated or driven out of these fertile lands by the Europeans, the Bantu, and the Hottentots. As late as 1900 there were Bushmen in fertile areas of the Cape Province, The Orange Free State, Basutoland, and Natal, but eventually they

1. Story 1958:5

2. See above, page 14.

3. L. Marshall 1960:337; Lee 1965:137, 139

4. Fockea monroi

5. Lee 1965:181-190

6. Thomas 1959:123

7. Lee 1968:38; 1969

disappeared from everywhere but the Kalahari Desert¹. As Tobias has succinctly put it,

The virtual extinction of Bushmen in the more genial areas has left only those who inhabit the most arid parts of the sub-continent. So, it is only since recent historical times that the Bushman has been almost exclusively a desert dweller.²

1. Tobias 1956:184; 1968:201

2. Tobias 1968:201. Recent archaeological evidence suggests, though not conclusively, that Bushman occupation in the Kalahari Desert dates back to at least the Late Stone Age (Yellen 1971a:276; 1971b:1). So, while it is true that some Bushmen have been desert dwellers for many centuries, it is only recently that they have been exclusively a desert people.

C. SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE /GWI

1. Who makes up a band? Why are these people together at /Ei kxa o?

Edible plants, game animals, and water are all scarce in the Kalahari, and their distribution varies from year to year and from region to region. In order to exploit these variable resources efficiently, a hunting and gathering society must be flexibly organized. As the distribution of resources changes from season to season, people must be able to move out of the poorer regions and into the richer ones, so that food and water may be more or less evenly distributed to all people.

The structure of Bushman bands is ideally suited to the demands of an economy based on hunting and gathering. Membership in a band is based on kinship, so that anyone may join a band if he or she is related by blood or marriage to a member of the band¹. As the life histories of !Gai and Ukxone suggest, men often marry several different women from several different bands². Because of this, a /Gwi person should have considerable choice about the band in which he or she can live.

Membership in a band confers on a person the right to exploit the water and the edible plants in that band's territory³. Since a /Gwi person is a potential member of several different bands, it follows that he or she has the option to exploit the water and plants in several different territories. As the distribution of food and water changes, people exercise their various options in such a way as to get the most food and water. Extended visits between bands are common, the visits being motivated as much by food as by friendship⁴.

Thus the composition of a Bushman band at a particular place depends on the number of people who have exercised their options to live there at a particular time⁵. The number of people who will actually choose to live in a place depends on the amount of food and water which is available there. /Ei kxa o, for example, was rich in tsama melons⁶. !Gai had rights to eat them there because his wife's mother was born at /Ei kxa o; and Ukxone had rights to the melons because he was related to !Gai's wife's mother.⁷ We can therefore say that !Gai and Ukxone were at /Ei kxa o because they had both exercised their options to collect the tsama melons which grew there.

1. L. Marshall 1960:345

2. Thomas 1959:84-90

3. Silberbauer 1961:353

4. Lee 1965:137-9; Thomas 1959:115

5. This implies that the size and composition of Bushman bands will change frequently. In fact, the !Kung population at Dobe ranged from zero to 42 between October 1963 and January 1965 (Lee 1965:44).

6. L. Marshall, pers. comm.

7. Thomas 1959:83; x

2. Are most Bushman bands as small as !Gai and Ukxone's?

From the principles of band organization which were discussed above, it follows that the more productive a territory is, the more people will live in it. In the section on the economics of the /Gwi, we showed that /Gwi country is on the whole much less productive than !Kung country¹. We should therefore expect that /Gwi bands will be considerably smaller than !Kung bands.

This is actually so. Ukxone's band had 10 people², and there were 17 at Okwa³, so the two /Gwi bands averaged 13.5 people each. In Nyae Nyae, with considerably better resources than /Gwi country, 15 !Kung bands which were precisely counted had an average of 21.3 people⁴. And in the Dobe area, which is as productive as Nyae Nyae, if not more so, the average band had 20.7 members⁵. These figures are not exact, because the Dobe bands were sometimes difficult to tell apart⁶, but they do suggest a general relationship between band size and resources.

3. What happened to Ukxone and his wife after !Gai and the others left them?

We do not know for sure what happened to Ukxone and his wife after !Gai and his relatives left them. The filmmakers did not actually see !Gai and the Okwa people leave; according to Elizabeth Marshall Thomas' chronicle, the Expedition left /Ei kxa o before any of the /Gwi⁷. The question of Ukxone's fate has been troublesome for years, and in 1972 John Marshall asked !Gai what really happened to the old man and his wife. According to !Gai, Ukxone and his wife did remain at /Ei kxa o after the Okwa people left. When the rains came later in 1955, !Gai and some other /Gwi went to the farms at Ghanzi to look for work⁸, and Ukxone and his wife joined them for a short time. But Ukxone didn't like the life on the farms: there was no work, and no food, so he and his wife started back towards /Ei kxa o with a group of other /Gwi. Ukxone died on the way, and his wife died soon after⁹.

The general question of how the Bushmen treat their old people has never been satisfactorily resolved. Two leading authorities both assert that the Bushmen always take care of their elders.

1. See above, page 15-16

2. See the narration to Sequence 7, above, page 4.

3. Thomas 1959:115

4. L. Marshall 1960:328

5. Lee 1965:46

6. See Lee 1965:42-44

7. Thomas 1959:137-140

8. See above, page 13-14

9. I am indebted to John Marshall for this information.

L. Marshall reports that "old, dependent parents are unfailingly supported by their offspring, and may choose which one of their offspring they will live with"¹. Richard Lee says that "the aged hold a respected position in Bushman society. ... The oldest people are fed and cared for by their children long after their productive years have passed"².

Others have painted a radically different picture. Tobias, for example, has claimed that the Bushmen abandon the old and infirm when they make forced marches toward waterholes³. But his report is based on rather equivocal evidence: Tobias did not actually see people being abandoned; he merely observed that there were no old people among the Bushman living at an emergency waterhole.

It is possible that the Bushman would abandon their oldest people in an extreme emergency. But no one has ever seen this happen, and two people who have spent years with the Bushmen suggest that it probably never would happen. Although we do not know exactly what happened to Uxone and his wife after !Gai left them, on general principles it seems likely that they expected !Gai and the others to return shortly.

1. 1965:259
3. 1968

2. 1965:197

D. /GWI MUSIC

1. Who plays music among the /Gwi?

Nearly all Bushmen play music of some kind. While walking in the veld, men often hold the ends of their bows in their mouths and pluck tunes to themselves¹. !Kung women, especially teenage girls, are fond of carrying a pluriarc² around with them and playing it at all times of the day³. Men like Uxone sit around in the afternoons and evenings, playing songs on their hunting bows⁴. Children play a variety of rhythmical animal games and songs⁵. Women often play the "Melon Tossing Game", accompanying it with songs and dancing⁶. And the medicine dance, with its rich singing, is performed once every ten days or so⁷.

/Gwi music may be divided into instrumental music and vocal music. Instrumental music is played mainly by the men⁸, and it generally serves only for the entertainment of the player⁹. Vocal music is sung by both men and women. In contrast, vocal music is thoroughly functional: it serves as a medium of contact with the supernatural, (as in the medicine dance), and as a method of instruction¹⁰.

2. How are /Gwi instruments related to those of other Bushmen?

The main instrument used by the /Gwi is the "musical bow". The musical bow is just the Bushman hunting bow¹¹: men use the same bow for playing music and for hunting, and when they want to play they merely loosen the string a bit¹². Both the /Gwi

1. England 1968:33

2. An instrument made by fastening four or five small bows to a resonator. This instrument is common among the !Kung, but has not been reported among the /Gwi (England 1968:251 et. seq.).

3. England 1968:346

4. England 1968:125; L. Marshall 1961:233

5. England 1968:65, 123; see above, Part I, Sequence 11, page 8-9.

6. England 1968:66, 641ff; see the film by John Marshall,

N!owa T'ama: The Melon Tossing (1969).

7. England 1968:390-501; L. Marshall 1962:248; Thomas 1959:130-35; see the film by John Marshall, N/um Tchai: The Ceremonial Dance of the !Kung Bushmen (1966).

8. England 1968:74

9. England 1968:63

10. In the women's Eland Songs, sung at girls' puberty rites (England 1968:576-640)

11. See the film by L. Marshall and F. Galvin, !Kung Bushman Hunting Equipment (1966).

12. England 1968:80

and the !Kung make extensive use of the musical bow, which is probably the only indigenous Bushman instrument¹. The /Gwi, however, are generally more proficient than the !Kung: they employ a wider range of techniques and have a larger repertory of animal imitation songs². The higher development of /Gwi bow music seems largely due to the teachings of Ukwone³.

Another /Gwi instrument, the thumb-piano⁴, is a comparatively recent introduction from the Bantu⁵. These instruments consist of a wooden sounding board about 12 by 18 cm square and 1 cm thick, on which are mounted seven to sixteen iron tongues⁶. The !Kung and the /Gwi pluck the tongues with their thumbs while they hold the instrument down on a resonator⁷. The thumb-piano seems to be more common among the /Gwi than among the !Kung. !Gai's son was recorded while playing one in 1955⁸, but the first was not seen in Nyae Nyae until 1961⁹. The difference is probably due to the fact that Nyae Nyae is farther away from sources of metal. Until recently, iron could only be obtained by trading with the Bantu, who charged dearly for it¹⁰. Only as wire and nails became more common in Nyae Nyae was it practical for the !Kung to make instruments with this valuable metal¹¹.

The /Gwi groups observed in 1955 seemed to lack the pluriarc, an instrument which the !Kung use extensively¹². However, we know comparatively little about /Gwi music, so that it is possible we simply have not observed them using one yet.

3. How are /Gwi songs related to those of other Bushmen?

Both !Kung and /Gwi songs have a rondo¹³ structure. As England describes them,

a main theme is established by several repetitions (perhaps with slight variations). Then there comes a departure from the theme - an episode, as it were, that may grow out of and resemble the theme itself,

- | | |
|---|----------------------------|
| 1. England 1968:126 | 2. England 1968:123 |
| 3. England 1968:124; see below, page | |
| 4. Sometimes called, inaccurately, the <u>sanza</u> | |
| 5. England 1968:220 | 6. England 1968:226-7, 237 |
| 7. England 1968:230; Thomas 1959:66 | |
| 8. Thomas 1959:66 | 9. England 1968:221 |
| 10. Thomas 1959:15 | |
| 11. England 1968:224-5 | |
| 12. England 1968:251 ff | |
| 13. A form quite common in European classical music. A good example is the last movement of Mozart's piano sonata in C, K. 309. | |

or may contrast with it rather sharply. Then, after dwelling on this episode for several repetitions (with variations, again), the player returns to the main theme, to repeat it a few times before departing into another different episode¹.

The length of a Bushman song simply depends on the number of times this pattern is repeated. There is no "correct" length for a particular song; depending on the performer's mood, the same song might last two minutes one day and twenty the next².

Ukxone's song, "Bitter Melons" (see Figure 8) illustrates excellently the rondo structure of most Bushman songs. The main theme, a, is repeated several times, with slight variations at a1, a2, a3, and a4. Ukxone then moves into b, the episode, and returns to the main theme again, varying it slightly at a5. In Sequence 6 of Bitter Melons he moves through this cycle four times. Schematically, the structure of "Bitter Melons" is:

a a a1 a2 a a a3 a1 a3 a3 a4 b

a5 a1 a3 a5 a a5 a1 b

a5 a1 a3 a a1 a a1 a b

a5 a1 a5 a1 a5 a a1 b

a5 etc.

4. How does Ukxone's music relate to /Gwi music as a whole?

While nearly all !Kung and /Gwi men play instrumental music, some are much better at it than others. In a !Kung camp, for example, there are usually only one or two good male pluriarc players; the rest plink out the same simple tunes, over and over again³. Only a few men every develop great proficiency on this or other instruments⁴.

Ukxone was a great Bushman musician. He developed to an extraordinary degree a bow technique which only he and Djoro had been observed to use: the art of using his fingers to produce harmonics⁵ on the musical bow⁶. Most /Gwi musical bow

1. England 1968:141

2. England 1968:96

3. England 1968:291

4. England 1968:81

6. England 1968:124, 198

5. When a string is set in motion, a series of standing waves are set up with wavelengths $\lambda/1$, $\lambda/2$, $\lambda/3$, ... , where λ is the

Figure 8: "Bitter Melons", beginning at 307:00. Pitches shown are relative, Transcription by the author.

Handwritten musical notation for "Bitter Melons", beginning at 307:00. The notation is written on ten staves, each starting with a treble clef and a 6/8 time signature. The tempo is marked as $\text{♩} = 49$.

The notation includes various pitch labels (a, a', a², a³, a⁴, a⁵, b, b^b) and time markers (307:00, 317:21, 330:05, 376:33). The piece concludes with a "FADE OUT" instruction.

Staff 1: $\text{♩} = 49$, 307:00. Pitches: a, a, a'.

Staff 2: Pitches: a², a, a, a³. 317:21. FADE OUT.

Staff 3: FADE IN. Pitches: a', a³, a³. 330:05.

Staff 4: Pitches: a⁴, b^b, b^b, a⁵.

Staff 5: Pitches: a', a³, a⁵, a.

Staff 6: Pitches: a⁵, a', b^b, b^b.

Staff 7: Pitches: a⁵, a', a³, a.

Staff 8: Pitches: a', a, a', a, b, a⁵, a', a⁵, a', a⁵, a, a'.

Staff 9: Pitches: b, a⁵. 376:33.

players use their fingers and chins to stop the string and produce the melody for their songs¹. Ukxone was a master at these techniques², but he could also construct entire songs with his technique for producing harmonics. His song "Shouting" is the best example of this³.

But besides an innovator, Ukxone was a superb artist. Although his music comes from a tradition radically different from our own, his "mood songs", like "Bitter Melons", have the power to touch us directly. When Ukxone first played this song, writes Elizabeth Thomas, "we stopped to listen, caught in the net of music which Ukxone had cast into the air, for it was a soft, sad song that he hummed and played, a song in a minor key to wring your heart, to make you think of places far away and make you feel like crying"⁴. Ukxone's ability to communicate across the wide cultural gulf which separates us from the /Gwi is the surest mark of his artistic genius.

length of the string. The tone produced by the longest standing wave is called the "fundamental"; the others are called "partials" or "harmonics". A partial can be made to sound by itself by lightly touching the vibrating string at one of the nodes of a standing wave. This damps all the waves except those whose nodes are at that point.

Partial or "harmonics" are always higher than the fundamental. The fundamental note of the lowest string of the 'cello, for example, is two octaves below Middle C. Touching the string in the middle produces the first partial, C below Middle C. Touching the string a third of the way from either end produces the second partial, G below Middle C, and touching the string one fourth of the way from either end produces the third partial, Middle C:

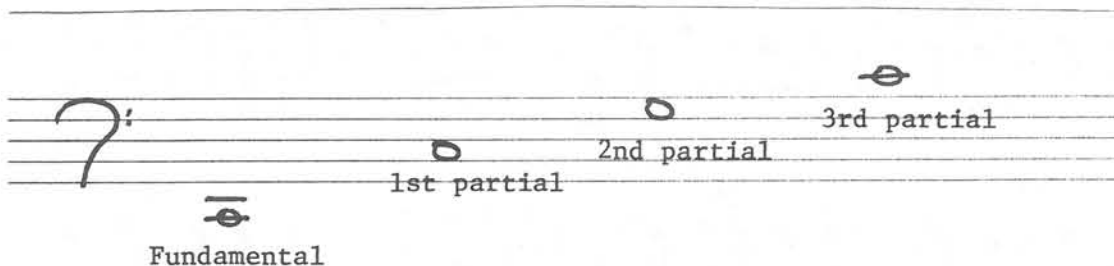


Figure 9: Fundamental and partials on the C string of a 'cello

1. England 1968:92, 107; see Bitter Melons, Sequence 11, 744-750.
2. See Bitter Melons, Sequence 1
3. See the partial transcription, above, page 7.
4. Thomas 1959:122

PART III: PRONUNCIATION GUIDE AND REFERENCES

The lateral click, produced by pulling the tongue back and touching the alveolar ridge. Speakers of English often use this sound to attract attention.

The alveolar click, produced by pulling the tongue back and touching the alveolar ridge.

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

The words here are listed in the order they appear in the Study Guide.

<u>Word</u>	<u>Closest English equivalent</u>
/Gwi	GWEE
Ukxone	oo-HOH-nay
//Ue//abe	gwoy-KAH-bay
tsama	TSAH-mah
/nham tsoro	nahm-TSOR-o
/Ei kxa o	NAY-ha-oh
!Gai	GUY
Djoro	JOR-oh
/un	GOON
duiker	DY-ker
!ka	KAH
/Oi/kwe	GOY-kwe
Bakalahari	ba-ka-la-HA-ree
Khoisan	KWAY-sahn
gemsbok	HEMS-buck
Okwa	OH-kwah
kudu	KOO-doo
agina ah	ah-GEE-na AH
Molepolole	mo-le-po-LO-le
Ghanzi	HAHN-tsee
!Kung	KOONG
Nyae Nyae	NI NI

Dobe

DOH-bay

tsi

TSEE

The exact pronunciation of the four /Gwi clicks is as follows:

- / The dental click, produced by pulling the tip of the tongue away from the back of the upper teeth. This is the same sound as the "tch, tch" which English speakers use to express disapproval.¹
- ! The alveolar-palatal click, produced by withdrawing the tip of the tongue from the roof of the mouth. A hollow popping sound is produced.
- // The lateral click, produced by pulling the sides of the tongue away from the teeth while holding the tip against the alveolar ridge. Speakers of English make this sound when clucking to a horse.
- ≠ The alveolar click, produced by pulling the tip of the tongue away from the alveolar ridge².

1. The description of the clicks is from Lee (1965:7-8).
A fuller account is given by Kühler (1962).

2. This click does not appear in the list above, but Silberbauer transcribes a number of words with this symbol (1961).

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